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SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE ADEN PROTECTORATE

II.—The Tribesman Class

By CAPTAIN THE HON. R. A. B. HAMILTON

Lecture given to the Royal Central Asian Society on May 26, 1943, Mr. H. E. Bowman, C.M.G., C.B.E., in the Chair. Captain the Hon. R. A. B. Hamilton gave an address on the "Social Organization of the Aden Protectorate—II. The Tribesman Class."

The CHAIRMAN said that in September, 1942, Captain Hamilton had given them his first lecture on the "Social Organization of the Tribesmen of the Aden Protectorate," and had so interested his audience and the readers of the *Journal* that the article had been reprinted in the last issue. From that lecture it was clear that Major Hamilton had gained a wonderful insight into the people of the country, and that he possessed not only an intimate acquaintance with the different sections of the population of that vast territory, but also a wide learning of the country and sympathy, understanding and friendship for the people of the Aden Protectorate. Those qualities were not always to be found in British political officers, and when they were it was up to everyone to pay tribute to them. Captain Gammans, M.P., had written an excellent letter to *The Times* recently on the future of the Colonial Empire. In that letter he said: "The British Colonial Empire is at the parting of the ways." If that was true, as it might be, then they should see that they took the right way, and if they were to take the right way he, the Chairman, could not ask them to follow a better guide than Captain Hamilton.

IN my last paper I described the classes into which the people of the Aden Protectorate are divided. The most numerous of these is the tribesman class, who are the warriors and the landowners, and it is my purpose in this paper to describe the tribal organization of this class and to suggest how this organization has developed and how the future may affect it.

The basis of the tribal organization in the Aden Protectorate is the confederation of tribes. The tribe itself is a small unit, rarely exceeding 500 males. Some of these small tribes are "sheikhly" tribes, and these form the nucleus of confederations. A few examples will serve to make this clear.

The tribes of the Yafa' Confederation inhabit the highest of the mountain spurs of the south-east Yemen range. They are divided into the sub-confederations of Upper and Lower Yafa'. The sheikhly tribe of both sub-confederations is the Beni Qasid of Lower Yafa', from and within which is elected the Lower Yafa' Sultan, which is the Chief of Chiefs of all Yafa'.

It must not be supposed that this Sultan of the Beni Qasid is a ruler in our sense of the word. In fact, even within his family, his powers are very small. A certain aura of holiness attaches to him as an hereditary tribal head, which we will shortly examine, but the influence he wields within his own small tribe dwindles outside that tribe almost to nothing.

The name "Yafa'" is the name of a pagan deity, and, in the absence

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Y 101 174 778 622 of histories, we may take it that the confederation is pre-Islamic in date. Apart from the name, the only other obviously pre-Islamic possession of the tribe is the sacred drum, the "Tabble an Nahas," which is kept by the Beni Qasid and which is accorded sacred honours by the tribe of Yafa' only. It is possible that before Islam the Beni Qasid were the keepers of the drum, and I am going to suggest that the present Sultans of Yafa' are in reality Priest-Chiefs, whose functions as such have ceased with the introduction of a new religion, although their hereditary position remains as heads of the people who once worshipped Yafa'.

H 101 619 622 Let us examine another confederation of tribes. About sixty miles north of Aden live the Qateibi tribe, surrounded by the confederation of the Ja'ud. At first sight the tribes here seem to be disorganized and unrelated, but careful study of dialect, of local stories, of the Qasidas or epic poems, and of such things as star lore and magical beliefs, shows that these tribes are closely allied in thought, dialect and custom and form a true confederation, the organization of which becomes clear in times of danger. Of this confederation the Qateibi are the central tribe, and their sheikhly family is the Akhram, from which the Qateibi Sheikh is elected. As was shown in 1904, a Qateibi Sheikh with a strong personality can have considerable influence on the whole confederation, but he is not expected to rule, as we understand the word, even within his own family.

H 619 [623] 174 622 With the strong 'Aulaqi Confederation we find a more complicated organization, but a similar one. Ma'an is here the central tribe, in all probability the ancient Ma'an of the inscriptions, a pre-Sabian kingdom of South Arabia. Ancient Ma'an was ruled by a "Grand Council," as we find from the inscriptions, and this system still exists to-day.

The 'Aulaqi Confederation is divided into three parts—the Upper and Lower sub-Confederations of attached tribes and the tribe of Ma'an—and each of these three is ruled by a Chief of the tribe of Ma'an, elected by Ma'an only. Again we have the sheikhly family within the central tribe, surrounded by the attached tribes of the confederation. Again the name, but this time it is the name of the central tribe, is pre-Islamic. If we look [671] for further proof that the confederation is of pre-Islamic origin, we find an ancient legal system—that of the Manaqid, which I have already described—strongly attached to it.

H 619 We could continue to find examples of the organization from other confederations, but these three will suffice. The basis of the organization is clear: there is a central tribe containing a sheikhly family, forming the centre of a confederation of tribes.

H 174 Y 643 How did such an organization evolve? How is it that Chiefs, elected according to ancient custom, are not expected to rule their electors? What is the origin of such Chiefs, and of the sheikhly families from which they come? Our answers must be mainly guesswork, but we may well begin by seeing some of the conditions under which an Imam of Sana'a is elected, for I think they point the way to our understanding of the whole problem.

The first condition is that the Imam must be whole in body. No Imam may be elected if he limps, is blind in one or both eyes, has a stammer, squints, is a leper or has any other physical disabilities. If, once

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elected Imam, he goes outside the acknowledged boundaries of his kingdom (the present Imam acknowledges no boundaries, nor have any of his predecessors) he ceases to be Imam, and a new Imam must be elected. The Imam is usually elected during the lifetime of his predecessor, so that when one dies the country is not without an Imam.

Now all these conditions are those pertaining to divine Kings. There is little doubt that they are ancient pre-Islamic conditions, and it is possible that they are taken from the conditions under which the Tobbas of Himyar became King and which governed the ancient kingship of Sheba. Some inscriptions made by the Tobbas, who ruled over Axum in Abyssinia, as well as Saba and Eastern Yemen, are countersigned, as it were, by a Minister who styles himself "The Sacrifice"—in itself a very significant title. These conditions must have been accepted by the Persian and Abyssinian rulers of the Yemen, and both they and subsequent rulers must have thought it as well to assume the kingship in its ancient form.

In the same way as the Imam is elected and proclaimed, so under him each confederation elects its Chiefs and petty Chiefs within their tribes and families. The central tribes elect their Chiefs, who become the heads of confederations, and each tribe elects its leaders within itself; only in the case of the smaller units, from the confederation downwards, there appear to be no such conditions as I have mentioned regarding the Imamate. All these Chiefs are figureheads who can exert a strong influence but who are not expected to rule.

The scene thus represented is one of the greatest interest to anthropologists and to sociologists. It is a stage in the development of nations. Before the formation of kingdoms and before Islam, Arabia was a land of many gods. Each of these gods was the particular god of a tribe, and his worship was in the hands of a priestly tribe who elected a Priest-Chief. He was, as it were, a divine Chief, and doubtless it was his main duty to ensure fertility, which entails all the priestly functions of bringing rain, guarding against disease and supervising agriculture. Both the magic and the custom were higher than him. He could not change either but was himself ruled by both. In inter-tribal disputes he spoke for the tribe and not for himself as ruler of the tribe. When Islam came, the tribal god vanished, but the Priest-Chief was left as a figurehead, with a vague aura of holiness but with nevertheless a considerable loss of his power, which was never very great. This is the position of the elected hereditary Chief in the Aden Protectorate to-day.

It is obvious that such Chiefs cannot be expected to rule their confederations and tribes unless they obtain military power. For the most part they are reluctant to do this. At one time it was the policy of the Government to give arms and ammunition to the Chiefs so as to strengthen their hands against their more unruly tribesmen. The hereditary elected Chiefs, however, did not respond to this policy as they were supposed to do, but gave the arms away to brigands in the form of bribes. The Suzerains avidly accepted these presents from the Government, for they understood rule as we do, and have held their positions through this understanding. This, by contrast between the two types of Chief, throws a strong light on the accepted position of the hereditary Chiefs. There is,

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622 as far as I know, nothing written to define their position, but it is
623 accepted that they can only use their position to influence their tribesmen,
792 and that the rule of the tribe is that of the tribal council, which is drawn from all the heads of tribe and family, and is influenced by all strong personalities within the tribe as well as by the holy classes—the Seyyids and descendants of saints. The strength of rule which the Chief can impose depends, therefore, on how much he can influence the influential. By his own position he is not a ruler; he is a figurehead; and if his ancestors at one time could inspire respect and fear through their magical powers, he inspires neither, except through his own personality. By a reluctance to enforce his rule, even when he is assisted to do so, he shows that in some vague way he appreciates his peculiar hereditary position. Until the official understands this he will live in wonderland, where the Chief he wishes to assist blandly gives Government arms away to his enemies and then returns to demand equality of force with them and the assistance of aircraft to defend himself. But the official is dealing with the older thing, with a type of community which long ago ceased to have meaning or motive, but has preserved the ancient forms of its pagan birth.

Y It is notable that the Imam does not attempt to rule the Yemen through
643 hereditary tribal Chiefs. He rules, as his ancestors did, through appointed
631 Governors of provinces, and these provinces often disregard tribal areas.
174 It may be that the Yemen progressed beyond the Priest-Chief state of rule
622 in the days of the kingdoms and under a succession of Governors never returned to it. I do not myself believe that the Mushreq has ever known other than tribal life and the rule of tribal councils and public opinion from the days of the Grand Council of Ma'an to the present day. The Yemeni parts of the Protectorate which are under Suzerains are governed after the Yemeni autocratic model. Here the tribal figurehead counts for very little, unless he is a strong personality and a favourite of the Suzerain. But the figurehead is still there for all the centuries of " foreign " rule.

It would seem that it is usual for the rule of Priest-Chiefs to be followed by that of tyrants. Perhaps it is that as trade develops some firmer kind of rule is needed than a vaguely conservative council under a Priest-Chief. The church, as it were, cannot keep the functions of the state. When it can it tries to endow every activity of the individual with a magical colour. It usually succeeds. But in South Arabia the religion was violently changed by a militant Christianity and after a few centuries by a militant Islam, and in the place of the old order, under which each man worshipped his tribal god, there came the new order of the conqueror and his appointed Governors. In this small strip of Arabia we are fortunate to be able to study both these types of rule as they react to contact with the modern world.

600 Almost the whole world has been through the phase of passing from the rule of the Priest-King to that of the tyrant, and we are no exception. It would almost seem to be a necessary growing pain for the people to first be ruled by autocrats before they rule themselves. But it would be interesting, to us who have passed through this phase and who see ourselves on the frontiers of the wider democracy of our age, to dispense with this phase and to at once develop a government of truly democratic form

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in those tribes where the rule of public opinion under a figurehead, who nevertheless can influence that opinion, approaches so much to a child's picture of our own. That problem I leave to the administrators.

Confederations under hereditary Chiefs in the Protectorate are in all cases in process of disintegration. It is, as one might expect, most marked on the borders of the confederations. As an instance, the tribes of Dathina belong properly to the 'Aulaqi Confederation. So do the Thula' tribes. We find, however, that to-day the 'Aulaqi Sultan of Nisab, who should be the head of the Upper Confederation of tribes, is reluctant to claim his headship over Dathina, and because of his reluctance the Thula' tribes, led by the Shamsi, have defied the authority of the Sultan and have closed the important road through their country to try and force the Sultan to assert himself. Land ownership in Dathina is almost more complicated than in most places in the Protectorate.

As a general rule a man may sell his land within the tribe. To sell land outside the tribe, the general consent of the whole tribe is necessary. It is particularly on tribal borders that one finds the land in the possession of Raya, non-tribesman class, peasant farmers, who work the land for wages. Where these farm land for a saint their position is fairly protected, but where their land lies on a disputed boundary and is the property of one of the disputants, their position is uncomfortable in the extreme. They are frequently pressed both by bribes and threats to affirm and change their landlord, and their position is the cause of endless argument and feud. As an instance, the land in Wadi Tuwana belongs to the Seyyids of Jebel Dhubiyat, who pay certain taxes for the overlordship of the Jebel to the Amir of Dhala'. The Seyyids have also a treaty with the Qateibi tribe to protect their lands in Tuwana, and the Qateibis dispute the right of the Amir to take any taxes at all from the Seyyids, who, they declare, should be tax free because of their holiness. If the Amir sends troops or envoys to Tuwana the Qateibis at once move there also, and a strained situation results. It results on the only motor-track between Aden and Dhala', which is used by the Amir and not by the Qateibis, who also thrive on strained situations, while the Amir does not. As a consequence, the Raya of Tuwana are practically independent and all tribal boundaries in the area are permanently in dispute. This situation is fairly typical of all inter-tribal boundaries in the territory, while in some parts these may be complicated by water problems as well. In the absence of courts which can uphold their judgments, I can see only a continued disintegration of the confederations from their borders towards their centres.

I do not favour the flashlight anthropological view whereby a people is shown at one moment of time and no trouble is taken to find out how they have reached their present stage of civilization or whether they are on the up or down grade. It is clear that these confederations are on the down grade and have been so for many centuries, ever since the kingdoms broke up, which in itself was doubtless a slow process. A main contributory cause of their disintegration is the blood fued, and there is little doubt that the grave social condition which has been reached in much of the territory comes from the uncheckable expansion of these feuds due to

182 628 411 436 [712] 182 671 576 183 the flood of precision rifles which has entered the territory in the last quarter of a century. In particular, the introduction of the cheap Le Gras carbine, selling at the price of four goats, wrought untold harm. Ease of killing and the extreme danger in which most of the people now live has resulted in the breaking down of tribal custom. In a certain blood feud within the tribe of Ma'an killing by treachery became the rule some years ago on both sides of the feud. Men were killed, in direct contravention of tribal custom, when they were being escorted by the killers and by Seyyids or holy men. The breaking of tribal custom may seem a small thing to those who have not made a study of tribal life. To assess the gravity of its breach one must enquire into its purpose.

Tribal custom is a code of life and behaviour. It lays down modes of greeting, which are stereotyped verbal approaches to understanding and friendship. It lays down laws for eating and drinking and for all the functions of life. It ensures honesty in public dealing and in private relationships. It gives rules of procedure for tribal conferences, for the entertainment of visitors and the protection of fugitives, the poor and the weak. In a primitive community it is the cement with which the community is bound together. When individuals can break tribal custom without punishment the last security for the community has gone and chaos is only a matter of time. When the breach occurs in the very centre of a confederation, as it has in Ma'an, the final disintegration of the confederation as a social unit cannot be far ahead. The confederations will break naturally into warring tribes, as has happened in Dathina. The disintegration of the tribes would follow were the feuds to remain unchecked.

182 693 728 671 [625] I have covered in the main the social organization of the tribes into their confederations and have shown the course which these confederations are following, a process of disintegration which began, no doubt, in about the third century of our era. In those districts under the rule of Suzerains social collapse has been halted by autocratic rule. This rule enforces peace by stopping the feuds and by supporting Sharia' courts, whose judgments, though often unfair, are at least upheld by the autocrat's police forces. Such tribes are, moreover, simple to deal with, as the government is vested in one man with an educated point of view. Whether or not the autocrat is essential for progress towards self-rule is a controversial matter into which it is not my province to enter.

[643] 000 In reply to a question as to whether the kings were killed off when they reached old age, Major Hamilton said no; they had reached a stage when nobody was sacrificed for them. In Uganda the King, when he was crowned, held a spear in his hand and two men stood with him, one the Prime Minister and the other a low-class individual. The King touched the Prime Minister with the spear, and the Prime Minister touched the other man with the spear. Before Stanley's advent, the King pricked the Prime Minister with the spear and then turned round and killed the other man. That was the sacrifice in place of himself or his father or whoever came before. As far as was known, by 700 B.C. there was no more sacrifice of kings in the Yamen, but there must have been before then.

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A lady MEMBER asked for information with regard to weddings or customs relating to the women. 000

Major HAMILTON said that in the big towns the women married to rich or ultra-respectable people were in purdah. Over the whole of the Protectorate women normally walked about unveiled and free, but in some tribes in the Yemen they had most peculiar veils of all varieties. Women had a tremendously powerful influence on political affairs. They would have heard of Mrs. Ingrams, who went into the harem and talked to the women. She had enormously extended the influence of the political officer. He thought it was safe to say that the women in the harem could influence two-thirds of the people while the political officer could only influence one-third. He therefore thought it was a point for consideration whether more lady doctors, who could speak Arabic and who were young and prepared to travel, should not take up work in these places, where they could go into the harem and influence mothers and wives. 582 562 000

In reply to a question as to how any business was conducted in the democratic tribes, Major HAMILTON said that the Chief would go back to his village with a proposition, whereupon anybody who had any influence in the tribe would meet him. There would be a frightful noise, and eventually he would say, "This is what I have been told"; then several people would jump up and say, "This is where I die; I am not going to do this." There would be a very long parley which would sometimes end in bloodshed. Sometimes, when it was a question of the payment of a Government fine, the whole tribe would split up, and then there was no opportunity of getting them together again in order to obtain any sort of concerted action. Once he was out on a very hot day and came on about forty men walking backwards away from each other with rifles pointing at each other. He shouted a greeting in a loud jovial tone. They all stopped and kept one eye on him and one eye on each other. He said, "What is going on?" and they answered, "A peace conference." (*Laughter.*)

Dr. HUGH SCOTT said he thought that Major Hamilton had made an extremely important point when he indicated that none of these social conditions were static, and there was a danger in accepting as final the reports of anthropologists and travellers who were only there for a short time and could only give a record of things as they found them at that time.

He wished to bear witness to the value of the work which Major Hamilton had put on record. He had been privileged to see him at work among the tribes for a short time when he was up in the hills under Major Hamilton's protection and the protection of one of the Chiefs who had appeared on the screen. He was now having to compile all sorts of information about those and adjacent parts of Arabia, which meant extensive reading, and he had not read in any book an account which equalled in detail and exactitude Major Hamilton's description of the social organization of the tribes.

On the political side, when he was in the Aden Protectorate he had discussed with English friends, officers of the Aden Government, the question whether the policy of indirect administration would be sufficient

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or whether it would be necessary for the British to go into some of the lawless districts and administer them more directly. In connection with this point Major Hamilton had given them much food for thought.

A question about broadcasting was referred by Major Hamilton to [207] Mr. J. GOEPEL. Mr. Goepel said there was a certain amount of broadcasting from Aden. The Navy maintained about twelve wireless sets in the chief centres, but from the ordinary person's point of view there was no broadcasting. Taking England as a comparison, it would mean that there would be half a dozen sets in Westminster, four sets in Edinburgh, and perhaps one at York and Ely, and that was all.

The CHAIRMAN emphasized the point made by Major Hamilton and Dr. Scott that peoples went forward or backward; they were not static. That was true of all civilizations, but it was especially true of some peoples who were not, so far, as civilized as others. He himself was an optimist with regard to the Arabs of those countries where he had lived and worked, and he believed they were going forward rather than backward. He hoped this would also be true of both the Arabs and the non-Arabs in the Aden Protectorate.

He thought Major Hamilton's remarks with regard to tribal customs were extremely interesting. If tribal customs were taken away the whole foundation would disintegrate. If the customs of civilized peoples were destroyed, the same would happen to them; only the law would remain to hold them together; and these tribal people had not even the law.

On the question of women, he and his wife were once talking to a British Consul in Syria about work among Moslems in Arab countries, and the Consul had said to his wife: "I assure you that a woman—the right kind of woman—can do more in three months than her husband as political officer can do in three years."

They had listened to an extremely interesting lecture, for which they were most grateful to Major Hamilton; this was his second lecture, and he was sure they would all agree when he said that he hoped some day Major Hamilton would give them a third.

(A few slides were shown illustrating the different types of men and apparel.)